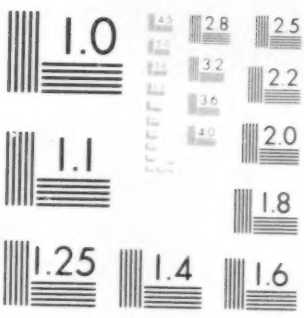
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DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 143 002 CS 203 544

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TITLE Structured Optionality: Individualization Without a Nervous Breakdown!
PUB DATE Mar 77
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Secondary School English Conference of the National Council of Teachers of English (5th, Seattle, Washington, March 11-12, 1977)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *English Instruction; Guidelines; *Individualized Instruction; Individualized Programs; *Language Arts; *Literature Appreciation; *Literature Programs; Program Descriptions; Secondary Education; *Teaching Techniques; Thematic Approach
IDENTIFIERS *Hawaii English Program

ABSTRACT

For the past several years, the secondary-level literature section of the Hawaii English Project has been working towards an approach to classroom management and materials selection that will allow both structure and individualization. This paper provides guidelines for instituting a system in which the class works in groups of three to five students, each group choosing from a selection of separate thematic units. Within each unit, students choose additional reading and tasks and also work at their own paces. Considerations for program development and material selection, for classroom management, and for teacher training and role definition are outlined. (KS)

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Structured Optionality: Individualization Without a Nervous Breakdown!

Of continuing concern to English teachers is the desire to create an individualized Literature program and at the same time maintain some structure and direction in the learning that takes place in the classroom (as well as maintain personal sanity!). Many teachers have tried a variety of approaches, only to discover that they end up with something similar to a "free reading" class, with little teacher input about the essence of Literature; or they back-track out of frustration to the structured one-class-one-book approach because at least they are "teaching" something.

For the past several years the Secondary Literature section of the Hawaii English Project has been working towards a materials and classroom management approach for grades 7-12 that permits structure and optionality to operate simultaneously. We have tested our materials with about 13,000 students and a large number of teachers, and we know that individual choice within a structure is an effective and stimulating way to teach literature.

(The Secondary Literature section is part of the K-12 Hawaii English Project--HEP--which has been in development since 1967. The other sections of the program are Language Systems and Skills, the latter of which is divided into Skills Lab and Skills Workshop. Installation of grades K-6 materials, winners of several national awards, began in 1970; the secondary portion began in Fall of 1977.)

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The format developed by HEP Secondary Literature permits modified individual choice, in which the class works in groups of three to five students, each group choosing from a selection of four to eight separate thematic units (explained in more detail below). Within each unit students make additional reading and task choices, and they also work at their own paces.

We have discovered that wide student option, within structure, is not only possible but satisfactory, providing certain development and management techniques are considered; and most of these are within reach of the individual teacher. Most techniques may also be generalized beyond literature and language arts to other subject areas. In the remainder of this article I propose to give you the Success Secrets of HEP Secondary Literature.

DEVELOPMENT AND MATERIALS CONSIDERATIONS

Materials development will profit from interaction among several people, if possible--teachers, curriculum planners, etc. These could be a group from a single school or, better yet, a wider-based group gathered as the result of a district project. One person must have the primary responsibility for the design of a specific segment, but interaction and critiquing as a group are invaluable for a quality project, and there is considerable growth in the process for the participants.

Materials must be ready when teachers begin to teach the course. Under the pressures of time and money, many teachers try to "create" individualized, multi-group activities as they go, perhaps keeping just a few days ahead of the students. There is no better way to exhaust and frustrate the teacher, and probably turn him or her off to multi-groups forever!

The unit(s) cannot overload the teacher with preparations of a large number of dittoes, etc. Initially we developed numerous worksheets, especially in the units designed for slower students; however, workbooks are expensive and, while masters can be provided, their number should be kept minimal. We ultimately reduced the number of worksheets as much as possible; instead we reproduced the activities in the non-consumable unit booklets that the state is printing and asked the students to use their own paper. Where we felt a worksheet was essential (as in crossword puzzles, etc. that relate to a specific story), we have provided masters for the teachers, and they can always create more if they want, but excessive amounts of required preparation will destroy any course.

A specific content focus is valuable, even with thematic units. For example, in order to provide a sequential literature curriculum in HEP, we designated a specific genre focus at each grade level. In 7th grade, for instance, although students will encounter all types of literature in the various units, each unit will include some emphasis on the structure and elements of the short story. At the 8th grade the focus is non-fiction; at 9th it is poetry; and at 10th it is the American novel. (Grades 11 and 12 have a different format.) At each grade we have chosen specific concepts or terms to be emphasized, and these are encountered in the introductory unit and all the optional units.

Each year the Literature program begins with a week-long, teacher-led introductory unit that presents the grade level concepts through working with the specific genre. (Seventh graders learn about Plot, Protagonist, and Conflict--among others--while working with Jackson's "Charles" and Thurber's "Unicorn in the Garden.") The students are then introduced to the

optional, thematic units and they choose their own areas of reading interest from eight units available. Seventh grade units include such themes as "Battling Fear," "Matching Wits," "Animal World," and "Strange Happenings."

Each unit includes several pieces of literature with related activities that focus on student response. In "Desperate Moments," a 7th grade unit for more able students, they will choose at least one out-of-class book to read, for which they will do a project such as a poster, a radio commercial, or an evaluation. They will read four well-known suspense stories and write an epilogue, a journal entry, and a script, as well as design a card game. A unit takes about three weeks to complete, after which another choice may be made.

Individual differences must be planned for, even in a homogeneous class. Some units require more reading than others, so that by combining the options judiciously, teachers have used the materials with good results in classrooms ranging from homogeneous to widely heterogenous. All units have a substantial list of "bonus" activities and additional reading suggestions. Teachers and students may create their own related activities. Teachers are also encouraged to delete specific selections or activities when it is appropriate to do so for a student who is having problems.

The activities developed must enhance the students' perceptions of the selections and encourage personal response. Related to each reading is a variety of response-type activities such as the ones listed above. These have been designed to emphasize key concepts, provide for increased students' awareness of their own reactions, and increase enjoyment. Student choice is permitted for many of these.

The directions must be self-directive, and they must be crystal clear and very specific. Each activity must provide such seemingly trivial

information as the following:

1. Does the student work alone, with another, or with a group?
2. Does the student use a worksheet or his or her own paper?
3. What minimum length is expected when any writing assignment is given?
4. What does the student do with an assignment when it is completed?

A typical instruction would read as follows:

Complete "The Sidewalk" Cartoon Strip. Work alone on this.

> The purposes of this activity are to have you review plot highlights and to have you examine characters through creating dialogue.

1. Ask your teacher for the cartoon strip worksheet.
2. Look at each frame in the cartoon strip and try to match it up with an incident in the story.
3. Then fill in the dialogue "balloon" for the appropriate characters. USE YOUR OWN WORDS AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE.
4. Hand in your cartoon when you have finished.

If specifics like the above are not included, and written very clearly, students will not function well independently, and the teacher will discover that she or he spends a great deal of time just answering the same questions. In addition, students must be taught that they are expected to read and follow directions. In our testing we discovered that often students are so accustomed to ignoring the directions and depending on the teacher for everything that even clear directions are not sufficient if the teacher does not insist that the students function independently.

The goal in our materials was to create activity booklets and worksheets that freed the teacher from most of the management work. And we have generally been able to achieve this; a concomitant result has been increased self-reliance on the part of students. Typical teacher comments at the end of testing were these:

"One of the best features of this program was the students' responsibility,

choice, and self-pacing. They worked independently and were self-motivated without my 'bossing' them. The students knew they were responsible for the work for the unit."

"Students were able to work independently and responsibly. More time was available for the less able student to receive one-to-one attention."

"I had not expected the students to be able to evaluate their own work as well or as honestly as they did. Most of the students were able to work independently and to pace themselves, sometimes at a much brisker rate than I would have set for them."

Indicate the reason or purpose for each task. The boxed statement in "The Sidewalk" directions is an example. This type of statement was added about midway through our testing. Planners were initially a bit skeptical about something so didactic, but teachers and students alike have been enthusiastic. Teachers like it because it reminds them quickly and specifically why the activity was included and it gives them something to check the students on. Students have commented that they like knowing why they are doing something. It seems to please parents, too, because, while their children are enjoying the activities they are doing, it is also obvious they are learning something "basic."

In the interest of brevity, these statements can't possibly cover everything, but they serve a valuable function; and if you have to relate your materials to objectives for evaluation, you will find these statements serve that purpose admirably too.

Whenever possible, provide the students with models, especially for writing tasks. The students are much more able to follow directions by themselves if they can see an actual model of what they are to do, or at least

are provided with a starter sentence or two. Adding models to our instructions cut down substantially on student questions.

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

Set up the room in such a way that students can handle the materials.

Management of materials can be a nightmare when you are working with multiple units unless the students themselves help out. When room management is organized from the very beginning, students quickly become proficient in maintaining the materials. With several units, it helps to set up one specific place in the room for the materials of each unit, with student monitors assigned to keep track of items. Students soon learn their tasks and often go directly to their materials when they enter the room and begin working even before class has started.

Students must be able to keep track of their own progress, and the grading system must be as simplified as possible. We ultimately came up with an Activity Checklist that has been one of the most helpful aspects of management. A student's Checklist might look like this:

	Points Earned	Revise		Point Possibility
1. Read North to Freedom	15			15
2. Complete the Private O Chapter Reports	3	✓	5	5
3. Complete the group map	5			5
4. Complete the group report	5			5

The student fills in the boxes with a check and/or the grade or points received when the activity is done. Need for revision may be indicated by the teacher. Teachers may also require that the students include an expected completion date for specific activities, and the list then also functions as a sort of

contract. Students especially like the list because it gives them a quick overview of just what they must do to complete a unit.

With several groups working on different activities, a traditional gradebook is impossible, so teachers also use the same Checklist, one per group, and record the names of the students at the top of each column. As the activities are already listed, they can simply record the completion, grade points, or whatever. The Checklists in the teacher's manual have suggested points for each activity, but the master provided for students has no points, in case teachers choose different points or a different type of grading.

Although students enjoy working at their own pace, they also like and need to work with other students from time to time. Our solution to this was to provide a number of activities in each unit that require small-group work. As mentioned, we provide seven or eight units at any one grade level. For grades 7-9 we recommend that the teachers use no fewer than four units, and in fact, only ten copies of materials, books, etc. come in each unit kit. However, we also recommend that no group be larger than four or five students, in order to allow for effective interaction. (This means that in our program two groups will usually be working with each unit.) Unit activities move between individualized work and small group, which provides a good variety for the students. All units also require a group Evaluation Session as a final activity.

Small-group discussion must be structured. This is especially essential at the intermediate level. Initially we tried directions like "Discuss the story 'Keoki' in your group." That was simply too vague. Now we include specific questions and often require that the students choose a recorder to write down the answers. In particularly difficult discussions, we ask the

group to schedule a meeting with the teacher. And the teacher directs the final Evaluation Session, which is structured with specific as well as open-ended questions.

Students also need to interact as a whole class from time to time. There are a variety of ways this will happen in any classroom, but, in addition to the week-long introduction, which is teacher-led, we have recommended that the teachers schedule a "sharing week" about the time the students are completing the first set of units. Each group must plan a presentation of some kind--from dramatization to a bulletin board display--to share their reactions to their units.

TEACHER CONSIDERATIONS

Teachers need to be assured that several activities can co-exist peacefully and effectively in the same room. Invariably in our testing this was the one aspect that teachers were initially most skeptical and apprehensive about. If they had never done any individualizing, they had a difficult time believing that it would really work, but it does work as they inevitably tell us later:

"I became a facilitator/resource person. On the whole, I was able to help students without being the center of learning."

"The program has necessitated my revising a familiar but out-of-date way of teacher (lecture--large class) that for me is no longer effective or comfortable."

"My approach has changed. When once I would have shied away from small group activities because of noise and management problems, I believe I now prefer small groups to a whole class set-up. Individual differences and problems are easier to detect, diagnose, or deal with."

"I was able to develop a more personal relationship with many students

and exchange ideas with them about the work. I was free to go from one group to the other or help students who were low in language arts."

We are all creatures of habit, and if we have done something one way for years, it can be very hard to change. (This is one reason why we have insisted that only ten copies of materials go in each unit. We know this structure will require the teacher to individualize. We believe that if teachers will only give individualization a chance, we can convert them. And we do!)

Teachers new to this approach need and deserve some pre-training before they begin working with the students. They need to become familiar with the philosophy and management techniques as well as the materials, or changes in technique rarely take place. This familiarity best comes about in a workshop setting. We have found teachers eager to take the training workshops on their own time. Our initial training for test teachers was a three-week summer workshop, and we had more volunteers than we could handle. For installation of 7th grade, more than 80 per cent of the state's 7th grade teachers volunteered to take a one-week training session. Once teachers see and experience new approaches, their willingness to experiment and risk and change increases substantially.

Teachers do need to be front and center occasionally. The whole-class introductory unit provides a means for the teacher to introduce the students to the management style, recording forms, and the concepts through whole-class interaction with a few specific pieces of literature. And, of course, at any time the teacher can bring the class together for a variety of reasons. In addition, during the final Evaluation Session, teachers have the opportunity to do the kind of probing, questioning, stimulating, etc. that English teachers love to do.

Teachers need to be reassured they are still important when students function independently. Believe it or not, one common complaint when teachers first began testing was, "I don't feel necessary anymore. The students are working so well without me." And this was said wistfully, or even angrily. Of course, what had happened was that the teacher had been freed from his or her position "up front" to work with individual students, to sit in group discussions, to interact where needed in many different ways; but this mode of teaching is so unique to some teachers that it takes them a while to grasp the possibilities. And while some teachers may admittedly never be able to make the move from the front of the room to the student's side, for most teachers it is a genuine thrill to discover that they suddenly really do have the time to help where needed.

Teachers need to understand the importance of scheduling their time to interact with students. At the opposite end from the teacher who is initially upset to be "unnecessary" is the teacher who is so delighted that the students are functioning by themselves that he or she spends all the class time at the desk correcting papers or doing other things. Individualization makes it essential that the teacher interact frequently with each student, and this means doing something more than leaning over and asking, "Is everything okay?" Teachers must actually sit down with the students who are working independently. Ideally they will schedule regular "meetings" with each group daily or at least twice a week. Time and again we discovered that students needed to have a minor misconception cleared up or a brief redirection on something. This is especially critical in relation to understanding pieces of literature. The effective teacher recognizes these needs and makes sure they are met. There is no question but that multi-activities require scheduling.

The testing teachers who managed best kept a blackboard calendar for each class with completion dates, Evaluation Sessions, Sharing Sessions, etc.

scheduled for each group. That way, everyone in the room knew what was going on and what was expected of them.

Materials need to be sufficiently open-ended so that teachers can add their own ideas and inspirations. We talk about "serendipity" in our teacher's manual. And we quote Dylan Thomas' line about poetry, paraphrasing it for literature: "We have tried to structure the Literature program with enough room for things that are not there to 'creep, crawl, flash, or thunder in. . . .'"

A good structure will allow for moments of excitement when students encounter literature they like, but it cannot guarantee those moments: they remaind at least partly a facet of teacher-student relationships. Optionality is important for both student and teacher; good structure frees both to become increasingly creative. Optionality and structure reinforce one another when the details of management are provided for. We think our management techniques permit exciting teaching to happen. But these are all means to the goal that all of us English teachers share: seeing our students light up with the joy of a piece of literature that says something to them, and discovering this delight again and again.